

IFPC: Master gunner, why not?

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Indirect fire protection capabilities, formally known as Counter-Rockets, Artillery and Mortars, is a new program the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy are creating. The Counter-Rockets, Artillery and Mortars project started in 2005 and is a work in progress.

I was curious to see how this new system would work in Iraq and to see if all the hype was true. I got my chance in March 2007 when my interceptor platoon deployed. We controlled eight Land-Based Phalanx Weapon Systems on Logistics Support Area Anaconda. We had two other platoons that controlled the engagement operations center and the sense and warn equipment.

After working with the indirect fire protection capabilities equipment for 15 months, I am a true supporter of the project. However, there are some areas that need some improvement.

Right now, any Soldier can perform an indirect fire protection capabilities mission. My unit had a variety of Soldiers from different military occupational specialties. But this caused an issue because other Soldiers from different military occupational specialties are not trained on air defense operations so they had a harder time learning their roles as Land-Based Phalanx Weapon Systems operators. This is where a master gunner would have helped.

Master gunner. An indirect fire protection capabilities master gunner would have to know all of the systems. There would have to be prerequisites to attend the master gunner course, such as attending the Land-Based Phalanx Weapon Systems operator and maintainer schools, the engagement operations center class and the sense and warn classes. All of the schools required would be given at the unit level and the master gunner school would be taught at the brigade level.

Only after completing those classes, he would attend a master gunner course. This course would require the Soldier's entire indirect fire protection capabilities knowledge. The course would teach the Soldier how to emplace the entire system in theater or in a training environment. It would teach in-depth troubleshooting abilities for all of the indirect fire protection capabilities' equipment.

Combat multiplier. The Army already has master gunner courses for the Avenger and Patriot weapons systems, and they have increased mission effectiveness tremendously. An indirect fire protection capabilities master gunner would enhance Soldiers' overall knowledge on the system, increasing mission effectiveness as well.

The master gunner would save time in real-world environments. Currently, when there is an issue with one of the indirect fire protection capabilities systems, it can take days to fix it, hurting mission effectiveness. This solution would decrease repair time because there would not be a need to wait for Department of Defense civilians or U.S. Navy Land-Based Phalanx Weapon Systems technicians to arrive to fix the problem. Plus, having a proficient indirect fire protection capabilities Soldier would enhance mission capabilities.

In garrison, the master gunner could create 90-day training schedules for certification purposes. Everyone who is involved with the indirect fire protection capabilities mission should be proficient in all areas, and a master gunner could train and certify the platoons and sections on operating the equipment. He also could ensure the unit stays current on all required training.

It appears that the Army will make the indirect fire protection capabilities a program of record, and that day may not be far off. We should start thinking about the master gunner option now, while we have the time to get ahead. The new schoolhouse for indirect fire protection capabilities is open at Fort Sill, Okla. It is a beautiful training area; so let's take advantage of it and get an indirect fire protection capabilities master gunner school started. ■



Centurion Land-Based Phalanx Weapon System test fires. (Photo courtesy of Ratheon)